

Message Text

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SUBJECT: FINNISH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: FINLAND GOES TO THE POLLS OCTOBER 17-18 TO ELECT MEMBERS OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. ALL OF THE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL PARTIES ARE PARTICIPATING, WITH CANDIDATES FOR EACH PARTY RUNNING INTO THE THOUSANDS. WHILE THE MAIN ISSUES REFLECT NATIONAL CONCERNS, LOCAL AFFAIRS AND LOCAL ELECTORAL ALLIANCES CAN BE IMPORTANT IN SOME AREAS. BECAUSE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ARE TRADITIONALLY CONSIDERED TO REFLECT VOTER PREFERENCES WITH RESPECT TO THE NATIONAL PARTIES, THE POLITICAL PARTIES ARE VERY MUCH CONCERNED THESE DAYS WITH PROJECTING THEIR BEST IMAGE BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. FINLAND'S QUADRENNIAL MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE OCTOBER 17-18, WITH 72,000 CANDIDATES VYING FOR 12,500 COUNCIL SEATS IN 464 MUNICIPALITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. INTEREST IS HIGH IN THESE ELECTIONS, WHICH ASIDE FROM THEIR DETERMINATION OF LOCAL PARTY STRENGTH FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS ARE ALSO A GUAGE OF PARTY POPULARITY IN AN UNSETTLED PERIOD OF FINNISH

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POLITICS.

3. VOTE DISTRIBUTION IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS APPROXIMATES THAT OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, AND IN 1972 THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SDP) LED WITH 27 PERCENT, FOLLOWED BY CENTER (KESK) WITH 18.3 PERCENT, CONSERVATIVE (KOK) WITH 17.5 PERCENT AND COMMUNIST FRONT SKDL WITH 17.3 PERCENT. HOWEVER, KESK IS THE LARGEST PARTY IN TERMS OF OVERALL COUNCIL SEATS (NEARLY 30 PERCENT), DUE TO ITS STRENGTH IN SPARSELY POPULATED RURAL AREAS, FOLLOWED BY SDP, SKDL AND KOK. THE SO-CALLED BOURGEOIS PARTIES GOT 55.1 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN 1972, AND OVER 61 PERCENT OF THE SEATS, CONTROLLING ALL BUT 37 RURAL COMMUNITIES BUT ONLY 33 OUT OF 80 CITIES. THIS YEAR'S INCREASE IN SEATS FROM 11,005 TO 12,500 IS DUE TO A RAISING OF THE MINIMUM NUMBER PER COMMUNITY FROM 13 TO 17 FOR TOWNS OF LESS THAN 2,000 POPULATION, PLUS NATURAL POPULATION GROWTH AND URBANIZATION.

4. THE FOUR LEADING PARTIES ARE COMPETING IN MOST COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE THE SWEDISH-SPEAKING AREAS. KESK IS ENTERING 17,000 CANDIDATES, SDP 15,000, SKDL 12,400 AND KOK JUST UNDER 10,000. OTHER PARTIES ARE REPRESENTED IN FEWER RACES BUT HAVE ENTERED EXTENSIVELY INTO ELECTORAL ALLIANCES WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH KESK AND KOK. SDP TRADITIONALLY DOES NOT JOIN IN MANY ALLIANCES AND SKDL HAS CONCLUDED THEM PRIMARILY WITH THE SMALL SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY.

5. MAIN ISSUES IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS REFLECT CURRENT CONCERNS OF FINNISH CITIZENS WITH UNEMPLOYMENT, INFLATION AND OTHER ECONOMIC ISSUES, WITH CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION PAID TO LOCAL AFFAIRS, ESPECIALLY BY KESK. IN ADDITION, THE ISSUE OF CREDIBILITY OF THE PARTIES THEMSELVES IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR THIS YEAR, AS THE VOTERS GET A CHANCE TO REGISTER THEIR DISSATISFACTION WITH WAY FINLAND HAS BEEN GOVERNED LATELY.

6. CURRENT EXPECTATION IS THAT THE VOTING PATTERN WILL SHOW A SHIFT TO THE RIGHT. A POLL TAKEN THIS SUMMER SHOWED SUPPORT FOR THE BOURGEOIS PARTIES AT 56.7 PERCENT, UP FROM THE 55.8 PERCENT OF THE VOTE THEY OBTAINED IN LAST YEAR'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, WITH THE LEFT CORRESPONDINGLY DOWN TO 43.3 PERCENT FROM 44.2 PERCENT. SINCE THE POLL THE GOVERNMENT HAS FALLEN, WITH THE BLAME VARIOUSLY ASSIGNED TO THE COMMUNISTS AND TO SDP

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DISAGREEMENT WITH KESK. DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE LEFT MAY FURTHER INCREASE THE BOURGEOIS LEAD, WHICH MAY ALSO BE HELPED BY THE IMPACT OF THE SWEDISH ELECTIONS. CONCERN WITH PARTY IMAGE BEFORE THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS EXPLAINS TO SOME EXTENT THE RELUCTANCE ON THE PART OF SOME PARTIES TO CONTINUE IN THE MIETTUNEN GOVERNMENT OR TO ENTER INTO A NEW GOVERNMENT, AND THE NEW CENTER COALITION GOVERNMENT WHICH IS EXPECTED LATER THIS WEEK CAN BE EXPECTED TO MOVE GINGERLY UNTIL THE

ELECTIONS ARE PAST. IN POLITICAL RHETORIC AND DECISIONS BETWEEN
NOW AND OCTOBER 17, ALL PARTIES WILL GIVE DUE CONSIDERATION
TO THE POSSIBLE POLITICAL IMPACT ON THE ELECTIONS.
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